



United States Department of Agriculture



**Agricultural Marketing Service**  
**OPERATING PLAN**  
**FY 2016**

# GOAL 1

## Enhance Communication with Stakeholders



AMS Veterans Special Emphasis Program Manager Yowei Peralta (right) is building collaborative networks that will attract veterans & help them advance professionally in civilian service.

- Conduct a stakeholder meeting in conjunction with Pesticide Data Program's 25th Anniversary.
- Ensure that the Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee meets twice during fiscal year to provide recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture.
- Develop an overall communications strategy for the Specialty Crop Program and update existing publications.
- Review grading and auditing program regulations.
- Evaluate AMS programs in context of food safety modernization rules.
- Strengthen relationships with other Federal agencies.
- Establish partnerships with two veterans transition centers to hire new veterans.
- Provide technical support to small to mid-sized agricultural producers, businesses, and underserved communities.
- Establish or expand 100 new markets through technical assistance.
- Host six stakeholder meetings with minority and underserved populations.
- Update AMS Outreach Plan by August 31, 2016.
- Ensure that Specialty Crop Program's website transformation is accomplished by AMS PA timeframe.
- Highlight "The Outlook for Organic Agriculture" as part of the transforming the rural economy track at the USDA's 2016 AG Outlook Forum.
- Sponsor one AMS-wide training session focused on the Human Equity Advantage and Equity Continuum; Develop a Human Equity Advantage project charter.
- Determine the Equity Continuum level (1-5) for 10 R&P boards, and advance 2 boards at least one level (1-5) on the Equity Continuum.
- Develop one new outreach/communication item explaining USDA, board and industry roles and responsibilities and ensure widest distribution.
- Conduct outreach and provide information to ensure majority of stakeholders are notified and aware of rulemaking activities.
- Develop a Marketing Communications Manual for the MOAD and R&P Stakeholders.

# GOAL 2

## Provide Market Information & Intelligence to Support Market Development



USDA Market News Reporter Lynn Collins gathers produce data at a terminal market in New York City.

- Improve the capabilities of the online People's Garden database.
- Capture new and existing community gardens and connect their activities to farmers markets and the USDA farmers market directory.
- Collaborate with other AMS programs to migrate data into Market Analysis and Reporting Services (MARS) System by January 2017.
- Establish a new baseline for the underlying MARS data architecture.
- Develop an outreach plan featuring important market information, analysis on trends and developments to reach stakeholders and other decision-making organizations.
- Explore reinstatement of the Market News national training to discuss issues, technology improvements (MARS), and improve consistency.
- Examine funding to support Pathways positions to improve the Market News succession planning process.
- Expand the collection and publishing of local, regional, and niche market data and expand market coverage of farmers markets by 40% .
- Revise or establish 3 Federal-State Market News cooperative agreements.
- Meet congressional deadlines for publication of the Livestock Mandatory Reporting (LMR) rule by publishing the final rule for lamb reporting by March 2016.
- Publish proposed rule for swine and other reporting changes by March 2016.
- Establish a workgroup to reconcile the differences between various Market News reports and assess the viability of creating uniform reports across all commodities.
- Crosstrain Market News reporters to collect different commodity prices.
- Issue timely Mandatory Dairy Product Price Reports 95% of the time and ensure Dairy Product Mandatory reporting accuracy by verifying 10% of submitted plant data.
- Complete analysis on dairy commodities to determine if stakeholders would benefit from additional price data.
- Prepare PDP 2015 database and final draft 2015 of PDP 2015 Summary for agency review by September 30, 2016.
- Test and report on at least 18 commodities highly/mainly consumed by children.
- Increase the international recognition and use of USDA cotton standards worldwide.
- Create Upland and Pima grade standard boxes that match original 1986 standards for use in AMS Cotton Program facilities and dissemination worldwide and collaborate with the U.S. and international cotton industry representatives to review all standard boxes prior to implementation by July 1, 2016.
- Ensure a high quality and dependable supply of Bahia grass seed for domestic and international markets.

# GOAL 3

## Provide Quality Claims & Analysis



USDA-AMS Auditor Marty Friesenhahn (left) audits the organic practices of a chicken farm in L'Isle Jourdain, France.

- Develop public-facing informational material that explains the Process Verified Program (PVP); Partner with stakeholders to highlight the PVP program.
- Achieve an overall grading reproducibility of 80% for the U.S. cotton crop.
- Demonstrate increased cotton testing data usage and cotton grading efficiency.
- Successfully grade the entire U.S. cotton crop while minimizing delays.
- Facilitate the domestic production of egg products by issuing permits for the importation of shell egg breaking stock.
- Develop methods and products that mitigate the manipulation of USDA certificates.
- Develop AMS-wide policy regarding whether to adopt Global Food Safety Initiative or other schemes for commodity purchases.
- Develop new AMS Billing and Information (ABI) system that will consolidate several standalone systems.
- Create an agency-level position to bring consistency to AMS auditing activities and develop agency-wide audit policy.
- Increase participation in round testing programs between international cotton testing laboratories and the Cotton and Tobacco Program.
- Assist U.S. delegation in the processed cheese, dairy permeate powder and mozzarella cheese negotiations of the CODEX Committee for Milk and Milk Products.
- Negotiate with foreign countries regarding requirements for a U.S. issued export certificate for dairy products.
- Resolve 2 trade issues affecting the exporting of U.S. dairy products.
- Successfully issue 95% of certificates promoting exports of dairy commodities in 4 business days.
- Launch a new Export Verification Program to ensure compliance with dairy grading export certification program protocols.
- Assess eDocs business requirements; Develop new scope of work resulting in at least 2 database enhancements.
- Provide technical assistance to Mexico in developing a beef grading system patterned after the U.S. standards.
- Conduct review to implement the pre-export check program for U.S. almonds exported to the EU.
- Provide oversight for industry boards and committees to support international activities.
- Develop a quality control aflatoxin testing program for the pistachio industry.
- Ensure compliance with quality requirements for the Export Apple Act and Export Grape Act.
- Manage Plant Variety Protection (PVP) applications by processing 450 PVP applications in FY 2016; Reduce application processing time by 5% ; Maintain inventory of applications below 400 applications.



# GOAL 4

## Provide Effective Oversight



Kimberly Mercer (left), USDA Market News, along with Valerie Schmale (center) & Bridget McElroy (right), AMS National Organic Program, shared information & materials with thousands of attendees last fall at Natural Products Expo East in Baltimore, MD.

- Review and approve board advertisements, nutrition, and research materials within 7 working days, 85 to 90% of the time.
- Review and approve board submitted contract(s) within 15 working days of receipt, 85 to 90% of the time.
- Review and approve board marketing plans, budgets, and budget amendments within 15 working days of receipt, 85 to 90% of the time.
- Ensure financial and administrative accountability of the R&P programs by completing management reviews of American Egg Board, Cattlemen's Beef Board, Hass Avocado Board, California Avocado Board, North America Blueberry Council, Popcorn Board, and National Processed Raspberry Council.
- Evaluate and further define R&P oversight.
- Implement a Consumer Communications Plan that includes: fact sheets in foreign languages posted on the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) website, tweets and a public blog.
- Ensure both remote and online sales retailers are in compliance with COOL requirements by developing procedures to assess compliance implementation and verification measures.
- Conduct 2 audits of individual companies' online and remote sales systems.
- Complete the California Federal Milk Marketing Order promulgation hearing by the end of the second quarter, FY 2016.
- Review hearing transcripts and evidence to determine necessary corrections, summarize testimony and evidence, and complete analyses for recommendations.
- Address 90% of appeals cases received in FY 2015 through a decision, settlement, or closure, in less than 180 days.
- Complete the investigation of 260 or more complaint cases during FY 2016.
- Work with AMS, USDA and other government agencies to implement clear organic regulations, guidance, instructions and policy.
- Conduct one NOSB training session and two NOSB public meetings.
- Implement organic sunset process by publishing federal register notice to renew 2016 sunset materials.
- Provide one in-person certifier training session that covers sound and sensible certification practices.
- Lead efforts to negotiate and finalize organic equivalence arrangements; Successfully complete required peer assessments to maintain existing equivalency arrangements.
- Support projects that implement the USDA Organic Working Group (OWG) objectives for FY16 and show measurable progress towards reaching their goals.
- Provide quarterly updates to the list of certified operations that includes updates on suspended, revoked and reinstated organic operations.
- Select a vendor to modernize Oracle into a cloud based system, allowing for use on smart devices, which may also include GIS capability, content management, online license application, renewal, and other enhancements.

# GOAL 5

## Provide Premier Procurement & Technical Solutions



Harvested Wawona peaches sit in crates. USDA purchases have helped this third-generation family business strengthen the local economy in one of the nation's largest agricultural centers in the San Joaquin Valley, CA.

- Provide decision-makers with a measurement of the effectiveness of activities under Section 32 of P.L. 74-320, to reestablish farmers purchasing power, by developing an economic model that evaluates the FY2015 surplus lamb removal.
- Manage the Business Management Improvement (BMI) effort, coordinating with the Food and Nutrition Service, Farm Service Agency, Foreign Agricultural Service, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to develop plans for changes to the commodity procurement business model and food/nutrition program delivery.
- Develop a process for decision-making, the documentation of outcomes, planning and scheduling purchases, and communication that results in an announced timeline of yearly activities to improve the efficiency of the commodity purchase program.
- Enable Commodity Procurement and Food and Nutrition Service to procure tuna for the National School Lunch Program and other nutrition assistance programs by facilitating reestablishment of AMS tuna purchase program.
- Merge contracting policies, procedures, and documents of the Kansas City contracting office and the D.C. contracting office.
- Continue to reduce sodium in processed and canned meats and expand fruit and vegetable offerings to meet the nutritional requirements of program recipients.
- Develop and charter a new program level governance framework to more effectively manage releases, changes, and business operations, while consuming internal business and systems support functions currently executed by the contractor.
- Design and implement a dual path development environment and develop operational support to maintain synchronization and efficient consumption of production system changes.
- Operationalize the newly implemented Application Lifecycle (ALM) toolset, developing SOPs for hierarchy management and business operation monitoring.
- Develop a software support strategy to maintain currency of all software applications, using the dual path development environment.

# GOAL 6

## Sustain a Rich & Diverse Organizational Environment



AMS Dairy Program employees volunteered at the Capital Area Food Bank. During their hours of service, they learned about the continuing hunger problem in the U.S. & how food banks are working to alleviate it.

- Complete AMS Training Needs Assessment and continue the AMS Mentoring Program.
- Implement program workforce/succession planning requirements and ensure AMS Employee Engagement/Cultural Transformation/FEVS action plans are executed.
- Develop and publicize agency hiring best practices guidelines and create a technical employee on-boarding/off-boarding process.
- Implement new grants management enterprise system and increase grant portfolio monitoring, management, and administration.
- Increase understanding of cooperative agreement and grants disbursements through mandatory employee training.
- Revise the Agency Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan.
- Ensure that all certifiers provide data to the Organic Integrity Database; Build and generate dynamic reports/statistics from the Database.
- Ensure all IT investments are effectively governed, properly managed and documented; Create new data or mobile application services.
- Implement the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) Common Baseline for IT Management.
- Reduce total IT cost (O&M) spent in modernization projects and evaluate help desk structure for possible improvements.
- Ensure LincPass use is enforced and that at least 90% of all high-priority Microsoft patches are in place.
- Reduce energy consumption by 2% compared to the previous year or trended average.
- Implement Spotfire analytics software and new automation systems for cotton classification that utilizes innovative technology.
- Conduct timely compliance investigations and audits to ensure programs operate efficiently and assets are safeguarded.
- Continue to improve the financial sustainability of laboratory approval and testing services.
- Develop a consistent oversight process for tracking and processing board payments; Analyze R&P billing and collections for accuracy.
- Develop R&P specific section in AMS' FOIA Standard Operating Procedures.
- Officially launch the new AMS "What a Great Idea" employee suggestion program.
- Provide timely status of funds and quarterly reviews to program and office leadership and conduct fee analyses on user funded activities.
- Standardize individual program terminology, forms and processes for AMS Billing and Information (ABI) System.
- Engage agency staff and/or convene Program Action Teams to develop Agency reports and administrative guidance.
- Support the strategic objectives and actions in the AMS Special Emphasis Assessment and Recruitment Plans.
- Exercise all of USDA's special hiring authorities; Participate in at least one related hiring event.
- Review annual FEVS results; Develop strategies with measurable goals.
- Conduct Headquarters and Field Town Hall meetings.